Ray Convinced Guard He Is Guilty, Former London Inspector Testifies

By JOHN BENNETT
From The Commercial Appeal Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON — A former chief inspector with the London Metropolitan Police testified Thurday that James Earl Ray told him enough in the summer of 1968 to convince him that Ray killed Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in Memphis.

Alexander Anthony Eist, 49, now the proprietor of a liquor house in Cambridge, England, was the lead witness Thursday as the House Assassinations Committee resumed hearings into King's murder.

The committee today will discuss what motives Ray might have had to kill King and what police security was given to the civil rights leader before he was shot to death on the balcony of the Lorraine Motel in Memphis the evening of April 4, 1968.

Eist, who retired in 1976, was assigned by London police to guard Ray after Ray was arrested in London on June 8, 1968, for the murder of Dr. King.

He also rebutted charges in August by Ray's attorney, Mark Lane, who now lives in Memphis, that he had been dismissed in "disgrace" by the London Police.

Eist was asked whether he was inferring Ray shot Dr. King because of remarks Ray made to Eist while he was a prisoner in London.

"That would be my impression, yes sir," Eist replied. "He told me he had tried to get into Africa . . . to kill some more blacks."

Eist appeared voluntarily to testify under oath.

He said that once he gained Ray's confidence, the convicted killer told him he had thrown away a rifle near the scene of the killing after Ray saw a Memphis police car.

Eist said Ray also told him his fingerprints would be found on the rifle and that this would be the only thing that might link him to any "conspiracy" to kill King.

Eist said Ray told him he would only get 1 to 12 years for conspiracy, though, and that he didn't appear too worried.

"Was he aware his fingerprints were on the rifle?" a staff investigator asked.

"That's what he told me," Eist answered.

Eist testified Ray was "very anti-black" in his remarks. He said he often used the word "nigger" in conversation and talked of going to Africa to fight blacks with the Foreign Legion. That testimony is expected to buttress later probes of Ray's possible motive for killing King.

Eist also said Ray was "proud" that he would make newspaper headlines. He said he talked several times in his cell of making money from the notoriety.

UPI

Alexander Eist

"He told me that it was his plan to get a lawyer to go on television and he'd make an awful lot of money," Eist told the committee.

G. Robert Blakey, chief counsel for the committee, in a narration of past Ray "admissions," said during the hearing that the committee will call Percy Foreman, Ray's attorney at the time Ray confessed in Memphis to killing King.

Foreman's testimony likely will amplify statements he already has given the committee. Blakey said Foreman has told the committee that not once during his four-months association with Ray did his client ever deny killing King.

"Mr. Foreman also says Mr. Ray told him his brother, Jerry, was with him on the day he purchased the first of two rifles in Birmingham, suggesting a family-based conspiracy," Blakey told the committee.

"Finally, Mr. Foreman recalls Mr. Ray even punctured his own alibi by admitting the mysterious 'Raoul' was a concocted figure," he said. "These admissions must, of course, be placed in the context of Mr. Ray's break with Mr. Foreman after the guilty plea and sentence."

Ray repeatedly has claimed "Raoul" was a man he had helped smuggle guns into Mexico. He says "Raoul" in turn was to get him a passport out of the country.

Eist was asked Thursday if Ray ever mentioned anyone to him that might have been involved in a conspiracy with him.

"The only person he mentioned to me was a brother," Eist said.

In an emotional moment during the August hearings, Lane angrily told the committee he had received a telephone call from a British lawyer who said Eist had been "dismissed in disgrace" from Scotland yard for corruption, perjury and robbery.

Eist said Thursday he was indicted in July, 1976, on conspiracy to commit corruption and to pervert the course of justice. He was acquitted of the charges.

Eist was honorably retired with pension in 1976 on medical grounds.

Rep. Christopher Dodd (D-Conn.) asked why Eist waited 10 years to "come forth" with his information.

"I think possibly I should have come forward," Eist said. "But I had an awful lot of problems of my own at that time."

He said he recorded his conversations with Ray in a notebook in 1968. He said he gave the notebook to his superior, but it was destroyed five years later. The superior is dead.

In reviewing the August testimony, Rep. Walter Fauntroy, the delegate from Washington, D.C., said an inference to be drawn from Ray's testimony is that he "first stalked Dr. King, participated in the assassination itself . . . ."

Blakey said Thursday that Dr. McCarthy DeMere, the physician who attended Ray while he awaited trial in Shelby County Jail in Memphis, will be called to testify.

During a 1976 evidentiary hearing, Dr. DeMere testified that before Ray's transfer to the State Penitentiary in Nashville, he asked Ray if he had been involved in King's murder.

"Mr. Ray's reply, according to Dr. DeMere, was in the affirmative, though he added, 'I wasn't by myself.'"

"The Committee must recall that Dr. De Mere is related to one of the prosecutors of Mr. Ray in the Tennessee trial," Blakey said.

Robert Jensen, special agent in charge of the Memphis FBI field office in 1968 also will be called to testify. Jensen reported to Washington by teletype in 1969 that Ray had told him a witness named Charlie Stephens probably could identify him from the rooming house across the street from the Lorraine Motel.

"Agent Jensen repeated before the committee in executive session the statement by Mr. Ray, a particularly damaging one, since Mr. Stephens is the witness, who, immediately after the assassination, provided a tentative identification of the assassin," Blakey told the committee.